

Kansas Water Plan

Information and Education Policy and Institutional Framework January 2009

Background

Kansans historically have enjoyed a plentiful supply of safe drinking water. Delivered reliably to homes and industries across the state for less per gallon than the cost of a 12-ounce can of soda, water generally is taken for granted. Only during times of drought, flood or ice storms does water earn a headline in the newspaper or a spot on the evening news.

Telling the behind-the-scenes-story of the pipes and policies and offering educational resources directly or through contract is the objective of the Public Information and Education Program.

Two objectives are described in the *Kansas Water Plan* related to this program:

- Kansas Water Office (KWO) public information activities should be directed at ensuring the public is aware of the *Kansas Water Plan* and knows where and how to obtain current and reliable information on the status of water resources in Kansas.
- provide educational activities to ensure that Kansans increase their knowledge and understanding of the state's water resources to enable them to make better personal and public decisions on water conservation, development and management.

Information and education are keys to all *Kansas Water Plan* policies. To make considered water resource decisions, the state's decision makers and all Kansans need to have an awareness, understanding and appreciation for water resource fundamentals. Knowledge and critical thinking skills developed and enhanced through various facets of the on-going information and education programs funded through the *Kansas Water Plan* help fulfill those needs.

Public information and education, while related, have different objectives. Public information provides timely and topical facts about specific issues or problems by means of news releases, feature articles, informational brochures, journals, bulletins, videos and the KWO web page www.kwo.org. Providing targeted exhibits on topical issues at governmental and professional trade shows serves as yet another way to deliver information.

Public education is process oriented with the goal of enhancing critical thinking, problem solving and decision making skills.

Kansas Water Office Information Outreach

The KWO works through the state's 12 [Basin Advisory Committees](#) (BACs) to deliver information to the public on local and state water resource issues. The BAC meetings are organized and facilitated by KWO staff members who serve as basin planners. They arrange for guest speakers or present policy proposals for comment by the committee members and local citizens. In turn, the meetings provide a forum for previously unidentified issues to be brought forward. The BACs serve in an advisory capacity to the KWO and the Kansas Water Authority (KWA).

Since 2007, one of the four quarterly meetings (usually in early December) is expanded into a regional conference on a current water resource topic. In 2007, the topic was "Bioenergy and Water;" in 2008, "Water and Energy."

The KWO works in concert with the state's other water resource agencies to propose consistent, coordinated proposals intended to conserve and protect water and related resources. Presentations are made to the Kansas Legislature and the Governor to advance these proposals.

The KWO web site, www.kwo.org provides a resource for current water issues, status of pending legislation, results of BAC and KWA meetings and a month-by-month accounting of the state's federal reservoirs. Electronic links to the other state agencies and relevant sites also are provided.

The "State and Federal Water Programs" directory provides a listing and description of state and federal water resource agencies and the services they offer. Printed copies historically have had a red cover, giving the directory the name "Red Book." The [Red Book](#) is complemented by a statewide electronic services directory available online through the home pages of many of the state's agencies, including the KWO.

Each month, the KWO publishes the electronic "[HydroGram](#)," a collection of articles on current water topics from across the state. A "[Climate Summary and Drought Report](#)," published monthly updates readers on overall climatic conditions during the past month and current drought status, if any.

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Kansas Water Resource Education Initiatives

Kansas' water resource education work is designed to create an environmentally literate citizenry. Water resource education initiatives funded by the *Kansas Water Plan* Fund are Project WET (Water Education for Teachers) and the Kansas Environmental Leadership Program (KELP).

In 2005, the State of Kansas added Alternative Dispute Resolution for natural resources to its educational arsenal. The program strives to create a mutual understanding of the facts by parties who hold different views on natural resource issues.

Project WET

Project WET trains classroom teachers and lay educators (i.e. Conservation District personnel and youth group leaders), who, in turn, use the nationally developed curriculum correlated to the State of Kansas' standards for pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. The program is administered by the Kansas Association of Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE)⁽¹⁾. A suite of related programs, including WET in the City, Project Wild, Project Wild Aquatic, Project Learning Tree, Investigating Your Environment, and Leopold Education Project complement Project WET and are taught by KACEE staff. The activities of these programs are used to reinforce water resource points at Water Celebrations held across the state.

Under KACEE's leadership, environmental education interests in the state came together and developed an Environmental Education Plan for Kansas. Seed money

for the project came from a grant to KACEE from the Region VII Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Kansas Environmental Leadership Program

The Kansas Environmental Leadership Program (KELP) provides environmental and leadership training to adults.⁽²⁾ Each year, up to 25 natural resource professionals are selected to enhance their leadership skills and broaden their understanding of water resource issues. They participate in a five-session (3-days per session) program conducted over the course of a year. Meeting around the state, they receive an in-depth look at region-specific water resource issues. The leadership training enables KELP participants to recognize and enhance the skills they have to engage and motivate others to become involved in environmental issues.



Kansas Environmental Leadership Program's (KELP) Applied Leadership Project located at the University of St. Mary, Leavenworth. Photo courtesy of KELP

Since its inception in 1999, KELP students have included Kansas legislators, environmental scientists, engineers, journalists, conservationists, farmers, and environmental advocates. The class diversity has added to the educational benefits.

For five years, members of the state's BACs, were provided partial scholarships. Their participation may have helped convince their fellow KELP class members to apply and subsequently serve on the BAC in their area.

Class members also must initiate and complete an applied leadership project. Working in teams of three or four, they generate an idea, establish a budget and recruit outside resources, both money and knowledge, to



Project Wet training and water celebrations

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complete their project. Projects have included field days demonstrating best management practices to installation of a hard rock crossing to prevent cattle from eroding a stream bank. Videos, booklets, and interpretive signs have been created on a variety of topics. Plans are to improve the KELP program to meet current needs.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

As water issues become more contentious, it's critical to resolve them in the most civil and cost effective manner possible. Alternative dispute resolution techniques can help.

In 2004, the KWA endorsed a three-year pilot project to coordinate the use of dispute resolution techniques. The pilot project was funded by the Kansas Legislature in 2005. Services offered include mediation, facilitation and arbitration.

While the specifics of alternative dispute resolution cases are always held confidential, examples of mediation topics have included allocation of water supply and lake level management to control invasive aquatic species. Facilitation services have enhanced the working relationships of many groups.



Alternative Dispute Resolution training in Newton, KS hosted by the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Bethel College.⁽³⁾

writing the agreements reached and each party's responsibilities. Agreements reached through these services are binding between the parties, but self enforcing. In the event one party feels the other has not followed through on its commitments, however, then all the normal administrative, judicial and legislative options are still on the table.

In some instances, the involved parties prefer to have a determination of a dispute made by an impartial referee who has the approval of both parties. They also decide whether the decision made by the third party is to be the final say (binding vs. non-binding) on the issue.

The Alternative Dispute Resolution services are sponsored by the Governor's Natural Resources Subcabinet and are coordinated by the KWO. The KWO recommends a trained individual. Neutrality of this individual is key to successful alternative dispute resolution.

Any natural resource dispute at the local, county or state level is eligible for these services as long as there is a state interest in resolving the dispute. Examples include multi-party, multi-county, or multi-agency disputes. Disputes which are likely to go to the Kansas Legislature, State of Kansas agencies' administrative review or the Kansas court system also are high priorities.

Participation in facilitated services is voluntary and is provided free or at a nominal cost.

Resources:

1. Kansas Association of Conservation and Environmental Education. 2008. www.kacee.org
2. Kansas Environmental Leadership Program. 2008. www.oznet.ksu.edu/kelp/
3. Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution. www.bethelks.edu/kipcor

Research indicates that compliance in mediation and facilitation is higher when parties have been fully involved in coming to an agreement. Once an agreement is reached, it is common practice for parties to put in